



An Unmarked Grave

Following a futile attempt to locate an uncle's gravesite and recover his missing headstone a family took their search to the the Office of the Premier of British Columbia. The documents before you, chronicling that search, were among those received in response to an FOI (freedom of information) request to the Provincial Government for records pertaining to the closure of the Cemetery at Woodlands.

*Michael de Courcy
New Westminster, B. C.
Fall, 2008*

An Unmarked Grave (fig. A)

CLIPPING

GRAVE MARKERS IN LIMBO

By SALIM JIWA

Mike Whistler is facing a grave problem.

The 28-year-old self-employed laborer has been left with 130 grave markers emblazoned with the names of dead children.

"I think someone should lay them to rest properly," he told The Province yesterday.

Whistler said he was paid \$100 by a developer in November to remove the markers, which had been used to make a path to a Coquitlam four-plex.

“He didn’t tell me what they were but when I turned them over I saw the names.” said Whistler.

The Saddle Street four-plex has been bedeviled by strange noises, moving beds and erratic TV’s. tenants are convinced the residence is haunted by ghosts.

The sight of a groaning headless monk sent tenant Dawn Hutton fleeing into the night with her four children two days ago, vowing never to return.

Whistler was planning to build a sidewalk with the markers until he read about Hutton’s frightening experience in The Province.

Now, he thinks they should be returned to the Woodlands Cemetery from which they were removed.

His younger brother, David, 25, agrees.

“They should go back to the place where they came from.”

Yesterday Hutton remained outside while her friends packed her belongings for her.

But the goulies couldn’t resist a parting shot.

“I left the lights on when I went over to my mother’s last night. When I came back to pick up my things, the lights were off and the children’s toys were strewn down the stairs.”

Other tenants are seeking help.

“My sister is arranging for the church to become involved,” said Lucille Schneider. “She is calling in a group called the Prayer Warriors”.

Staff photo by Dick Loughram

David Whilster with the errant grave markers: ‘ They should go back where they came from’

An Unmarked Grave (fig. B)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Unknown (Sender's name severed from text)
Feb. 9, 1998

To: British Columbia Premier Glen Clark

Re: Woodlands Memorial Garden

In April, 1966 my husband and I made a trip out west and camped at Cariboo R.V. Park in Burnaby, B.C. The purpose of the trip was to meet a second cousin to pursue a genealogy study of my maiden name severed text. My father and his three siblings were children at the Bernardo Home and all died not knowing of their background.

The youngest severed text was institutionalized at Riverview Hospital in Port Coquitlam, B.C. on severed text with a diagnosis of Huntington's disease. Prior to that he had made his home in Oyama, B.C. severed text died severed text a virtual pauper. While there I decided to see where he was interred and got the 'shock of my life.'

Evidently during the reign of Bill Vander Zalm it was decided out the front of St. Mary's Hospital (actually the writer is referring here to Queen's Park Hospital) should become a park / memorial garden. There is a bronze plaque on a stone hidden under a large evergreen to substantiate this. I understand this was advertised a Vancouver newspaper with a 90 days notice to the respective families (September 30, 1976). No attempt was made to contact my father, my mother and myself. (only family) in spite of the fact that the hospital had my parents address. The remaining stones were all removed with the understanding that they were to be put into a rock garden or similar. While there a security guard, severed text, along with the assistance of two patients, to see what became of the stone from my uncle's grave. He physically checked 178 tombstones in the garden shed with no luck. There are over 400 in the fountain. The total gravestones involved number 3090. My Uncle grave was in severed text which was close to the roadway into the Hospital.

An Unmarked Grave (fig. C)

CORRESPONDENCE (Continued)

From newspaper articles:

“Woodlands cemetery part of new gardens” - from Columbian, June 11, 1977

“Grave Markers in Limbo” - from The Province , December 10, 1986

it is apparent that some of them were used for patio stones as well as a base for a parking lot in the nearby area.

This is unheard of to desecrate a burial ground like this. The actual burial plots have sunken into near knee depth and the few stones that I seen under some of the trees are overgrown. See inclosed photos.

*It is a shame that this man came to such hardship, firstly being a “Home Child” of Barnardos, being in a mental institution, and then having his grave abandoned and mutilated. Two of his brothers are buried here in **severed text** and it was my hopes that his headstone also could be put to rest along with theirs instead of being part of someones barbecue. British Columbia should be ashamed of it's self to have done something such as this.*

I now understand that St Mary's Hospital (actually the writer is referring here to Queen's Park Hospital) is to be torn down. I doubt that such would be the case but should this missing tombstone show up I would like to follow through with the idea of having it placed with my brothers graves.

Yours truly,

severed text

An Unmarked Grave (fig. D)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Unknown (Sender's name severed from text)
March 23, 1998

To: British Columbia Premier Glen Clark

Re: My letter and photos dated Feb. 9, 1998

In the above mentioned letter I wrote you in regards to Woodlands Memorial Garden cemetery where severed text had been buried) as of today I have neither heard that you have received it, or have followed up on it. I would appreciate an answer to the letter.

Perhaps I should have sent a copy of the letter to the Columbian or the Province newspapers to see if they could shed some light on the matter.

It may seem unimportant to you, but I feel that it is disgraceful to have a situation such as this exist with the tampering of grave sites.

Yours truly,

severed text

An Unmarked Grave (fig. E)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Province of British Columbia
May 8, 1998

To: Unknown (Recipient's name severed from text)

Dear severed text

Premier Clark has requested that I respond on his behalf to your letters dated February 9, and march 23, 1998, concerning your desire to obtain severed text headstone. Please accept my apologia for the delay in responding.

I have forwarded your letter and attached documentation to Mary Freeman, Registrar of Cemetery and Funeral Services, and requested that she contact you directly to discuss this matter. Should you wish to contuse the Registrar, she can be reached at :

Registrar of Cemetery and Funeral Services
Ministry of the Attorney General
PO box 9297 Stn Prov Gov
Victoria, BC, V8W 9J8
Phone: 250 387 1271

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the attention of the government.

Yours sincerely,

Ujjal Dosanjh
Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Glen Clark
Mary Freeman

An Unmarked Grave (fig. F)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Unknown (Sender's name severed from text)
Feb. 4, 1999

To: Ujjal Dosanjh
Attorney General

Re: *Your letter dated May 8th, 1998 in reference to missing tombstone of severed text my original letter Feb, 9 & Mar. 23, 1998*

In your letter, that you answered on behalf of Premier Clark, you stated that you were forwarding the information on to the registrar of cemetery and funeral services to the attention of Mary Freeman for them to handle.

Ms. Freeman phoned me on April 8, 1998 and informed me that she would be back in touch. This has not happened. I realize that it takes time but ten months plus, seems excessive. This incident should not have happened in the first place and it is disgusting in the manner in which it is now being "shoved under the rug". It makes me think that you people think that I will drop the subject. Not so. Perhaps my next correspondence should be to the attention of the Columbian or the Province newspapers. I am sure that there are other people who are not aware of the shoddy manner in which these graves were handled.

I would appreciate some sort of response from you on this matter.

Yours truly,

severed text

An Unmarked Grave (fig. G)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Province of British Columbia
February 15, 1999

To: Unknown (Recipient's name **severed** from text)

Dear **severed text**

Re: Missing Tombstone of **severed text**

As discussed in our phone conversation of February 15, 1999, Graham Duggan of BC Buildings Corporation informed me in late October that BC Buildings Corporation has made a commitment to have the issue of the handling of the headstones resolved.

As you know, many of the headstones have been destroyed and are unrecoverable. I understand that BC Buildings' staff are attempting to find and remove all the headstones from walkways patios and ponds. These headstones will be brought back to Woodlawn for an appropriate and respectful disposition. Should they be able to locate **severed text** headstone, I am sure that BC Buildings Corporation would be pleased to assist with making arrangements to have the headstone sent to **severed text**.

By means of this letter I am forwarding a copy of all correspondence to Mr. Duggan so he can contact you when they have completed their research. Mr. Duggan can be reached at 250-952-8329. If you have any questions regarding the above, I can be reached on my direct line at 250-953-3244.

Yours truly

Mary Freeman
Registrar
Cemetery and Funeral Services

cc: Graham Duggan, BCBC

An Unmarked Grave (fig. H)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Province of British Columbia
April 27, 1999

To: Unknown (Recipient's name severed from text)

Dear severed text

Please accept my apology for the delay in responding to your letter dated February 4, 1999, regarding severed text missing headstone from Woodlands Memorial Garden.

I am advised that in October 1998, this matter was referred to Graham Duggan of British Columbia Buildings Corporation (BCBC). As you may know the BCBC is responsible for the former Woodlands Cemetery and they have made a commitment to resolve the issue of the missing headstones. I am further advised that Mary Freeman, Registrar of Cemeteries and Funeral Services, contacted you by telephone on February 15, 1999, to inform you of this.

I have taken the liberty of forwarding a copy of your letter to Dennis Truss, Chief Executive Officer of BCBC, for his consideration. Should you wish to contact them in the meantime, they can be reached at:

Dennis Truss, President and Chief Executive Officer
BC Buildings Corporation
3350 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC V8Z 3L1

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the attention of the government.

Yours sincerely,

Ujjal Dosanjh
Attorney General

cc: Dennis Truss

An Unmarked Grave (fig. 1)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: BC Buildings Corporation
May 10, 1999

To: Unknown (Recipient's name severed from text)

Dear severed text

Further to your correspondence with the Attorney General of British Columbia the Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh, QC, regarding the disposition of grave markers at the Woodlands/Queens Park Hospital in New Westminster, I am pleased to provide information respecting the history of this matter and the Province's commitment to have this matter addressed in an appropriate manner.

By way of background, the cemetery near Woodlands was operational from 1900 until its closure in 1958. Initiatives through-out the mid-1970s culminated in 1977 in the issue of an Order-in-Council to the Queens Park Hospital to accept the responsibility for the Maintenance of the closed cemetery. Just after that time, a decision was made by the Hospital Society to remove and dispose of the markers. At about the same time, the BC Buildings Corporation (BCBC) was created. Following the Society's decision respecting the markers, a memorial tablet and stone were installed in the old cemetery/memorial park in September of 1978.

Since that time a number of the markers removed from the cemetery have been found around the site, as well as off-site. Most, if not all extant markers have now been identified and either have been, or have been, in the process of being, moved to a storage facility on the Woodlands property. Although the remains of several thousands of people are buried in the cemetery, the old records are silent as to which graves had markers and which did not. Accordingly and regrettably, there is no way of knowing if there are other markers in existence. Never the less, areas are being searched to discover traces of any additional markers.

In late 1998, a steering committee was formed to deal with these cemetery issues. The steering committee is composed of representatives from the following stake holders: the BC Association for Community Living; Queens Park Hospital; The Ministry for Children and Families; and BCBC. Several steering committee meetings have been held thus far in 1999; during which, four main objectives have been established:

- . Development of a memorial garden on the cemetery site;
- . development of a memorial which recognizes those whose remains lie therein, and which demonstrates the historical significance of these individuals' lives.

- . development of a feature demonstrating that humankind has learned from these mistakes in the handling of persons with disabilities; and,
- . development of a plan to ensure the proper handling of all extant markers.

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An Unmarked Grave (fig. J)

CORRESPONDENCE

To: Unknown (Recipient's name severed from text)

May 10, 1999, page 2

The steering committee also created a smaller working committee including several persons with special expertise in cemetery/memorial park design, and local history. This working committee has been tasked to resolve the issues arising from the four objectives noted above.

Enclosed for your reference are copies of minutes of committee meetings that have taken place to date. I have asked Gregg Sikora, the Corporation's Client Service Manager, to insure that you receive subsequent meeting minutes as well.

I would like to close with assurances that both committees, as well as the stakeholder groups which they represent, are committed to ensuring the remains of those individuals interred at Woodlands are dealt with in a manner respectful of their dignity and their memory.

Yours very truly,

Dennis F. Truss
President and Chief Executive Officer

Enclosures

pc Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh, QC
Attorney General

Mr. M. Corbeil
Deputy Minister
Ministry for Children and Family

Mr. G. Sikora
Client Services Manager
BCBC

An Unmarked Grave (fig. K)

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Unknown (Sender's name severed from text)

Received May 6, 1999

To: Ujjal Dosanjh
Attorney General
P.O.Box 9044, Stn. Prov. Govt
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 9E2

Dear Mr Dosanjh:

Enclosed you will see copies of both letters from you. One dated May 8, 1998 and the other April 27, 1999. It has taken almost one year to basically tell me the same thing, namely that you are passing the matter on to other hands. Why cannot you people accept the fact that the former premier messed up big-time and that you do not know what to do about it ? Perhaps some media attention would you assist you in finding out what not only happened to the stone of my uncle severed text but to others that were wised to build patios , barbecues and the like of the officials of the government of Brithish Columbia. I am aware of the news coverage that this had at the time.

It is not only shameful that these graves were desecrated like they were but that nothing was done about the situation is inexcusable. Change of political parties really does not excuse something of this nature. Therte must be other families equally as upset with the situation as I am. When we leave this earth it should be treated with dignity and respect.

I sincerely hope that some solution will come of this before another year passes.

Yours truly,

severed text

An Unmarked Grave (fig. L)

CORRESPONDENCE

To: Unknown (Recipient's name severed from text)

Dear severed text

Thank you for your letter of April 27, 1999 regarding severed text headstone at Woodlands Memorial Garden.

BC Buildings Corporation has agreed that many of the headstones are missing and may never be found. Unfortunately, Your Uncle's headstone may be one of those. They have informed our office that they will attempt to find a resolution to this issue that will lend dignity to the final disposition of the headstones that have been located.

I have forwarded a copy of your letter to Dennis Truss, Chief Executive Officer of BC Buildings Corporation, for his consideration.

I appreciate you bringing your concerns to my attention and regret that there is nothing further that can be done on your behalf.

Yours sincerely,

Ujjal Dosanjh
Attorney General